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Hunt, Ezra Mundy

ABOUT THE WAR.



"So long as you remain UNITED, said the old man, (pointing the attention of his boys to the bundle of sticks,) "you are a match for all your enemies; but SEPARATE, and you are UNDONE."

PLAIN WORDS TO PLAIN PEOPLE

BY A

PLAIN MAN.

PHILADELPHIA.

1863.

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☛ To the hard-working, sober, industrious people of the city and country, who want to see the return of peaceful and prosperous days, these plain words are addressed, in the hope that they will show how vain it is to expect their return, unless we have one heart and one mind and one purpose—ABOUT THE WAR.

28 F. O. R.
Arba Blodgett

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A FEW PLAIN WORDS, ETC.

IF there is any one thing about which everybody thinks and everybody talks, in these days, it is the *war*. How many *feel* right about it, it is not so easy to tell. One way to feel right about it is to understand the cause and consequences of it, and in trying to show these we need not use any harsh or unkind words.

We all know how our country began. A few families came across the sea and settled on the James River, at the South, and were followed in five or six years by another party that settled on the shores of Cape Cod, at the North. The newcomers suffered a great many hardships, but after a while things became settled. The colonies (as they were called) were under the English government, as the Canadas are now, and for nearly one hundred and fifty years they were prosperous. They had a good understanding among themselves, and also with the British government. The farmers and fishermen of New England worked hard, and made a comfortable living. They were sober, industrious, and resolute; thought a good deal of churches and schools, and meddled very little with anybody's business but their own.

The people of the colonies of New York and Pennsylvania had much the same interests with those of the more northern colonies. Iron and coal were then lying undisturbed in their mountains, while agriculture and commerce were their chief pursuits.

Farther south were Delaware, Virginia, Maryland, Georgia, and the Carolinas. Their interests, then, were not materially different from the rest of the country. The people were from a different European stock, to be sure, and had different ways and manners from those of the North, and perhaps the climate and soil had some influence in making them less hardy and enterprising; but friendship and good neighbourhood prevailed

all around. The vast regions of the continent now possessed by the Western and Northwestern States were then an almost unexplored wilderness. If you will take the map which your child brings home from school, and cover up the space occupied by Alabama, Arkansas, California, Florida, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Louisiana, Michigan, Mississippi, Missouri, Ohio, Tennessee, Texas, Wisconsin, Kansas, Minnesota, Oregon, and the territories of Utah, Washington, Nebraska, &c., &c., the part left uncovered will show you how narrow were the bounds of our country in its colonial state.

Matters went on smoothly enough till the English Government showed a disposition to exact from us what seemed unjust. For a while this treatment was borne patiently. Humble remonstrances and petitions were sent to London, but they did not avail much; and at last our people determined to bear the yoke no longer. It took a good while (as it always does) to work the popular spirit up to the point of resistance. A body of British soldiers were posted in Boston to enforce the offensive laws, and in March, 1770, a collision occurred between a portion of this force and the populace. On the fifth day of that month, in the principal street of that city, the first drop of American blood was drawn by a British bullet, and it kindled a spirit which has stayed on our soil from that hour to this. The perpetrators of the deed were tried, but the evidence being conclusive that the assault was provoked by the taunts and insults of the people, they were acquitted. Nevertheless, the citizens determined to rid themselves of the presence of an armed hostile force, and it was but a few days before every British soldier was withdrawn from that city.

Three years after this a cargo of tea was sunk in Boston harbour, to avoid paying the duties which the British Government imposed on it. The people were determined not to submit to what they deemed oppressive and tyrannical laws. To resist was a bold step for the feeble colonists to take. They would cut off their chief resource for a comfortable subsistence. They had no manufactures—had made but little progress in the mechanic arts—had few commercial privileges beyond those which the mother country furnished or controlled—and by this step they would involve themselves in a war with one

of the most powerful nations in the world, and that, too, the nation from which they sprang, and with which they had the closest ties. Who was there to give them succour or to pity them, if they should fail in accomplishing their deliverance?

Two years more passed before the separating blow was struck, and the Colonies—one and all—declared themselves forever free from British dominion. For seven long and gloomy years was the battle fought. Under the great and good Washington, whose trust in the overruling providence of God was as firm as the Alleghanies, an army was maintained at sacrifices almost incredible and in the face of difficulties almost unconquerable. In spite of disasters and defeats; with many open and secret enemies and plotters of mischief in the army and in the national councils, Washington kept the confidence of the great body of the people until a complete victory was obtained, and in 1783 an honorable treaty of peace was formed, recognizing the United States of America as a free, sovereign and independent nation. This glorious heritage, secured at such pains and sacrifices, and enhanced in value by the fruits of industry and enterprise which have accumulated during the intervening period of eighty years, we are, to-day, in danger of losing by the most insane folly!

In the grand struggle which ended in our freedom and in the organization of the new government, the North and the South were one, but there was, of course, much diversity of opinion as to the powers which should be relinquished by each member of the Confederacy (as it was called) to the central or general government, and it turned out upon trial that they did not relinquish enough to give it the requisite energy for accomplishing its purpose. When the people became convinced that a different government was necessary for the prosperity and safety of the country, a full and fair expression of the popular will resulted in the adoption of the Constitution, in the main as we now have it. It received the sanction of New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, North and South Carolina and Georgia. All the States admitted since have acknowledged this Constitution to be the supreme law, as a condition of admission.

General Washington was the first called to fill the office of President, and at the end of his second term, John Adams succeeded him.

Even at this early period of our national history causes of dissension and controversy were apprehended; and in his farewell address to the people, Washington fore-warned them that "the point in the political fortress against which the batteries of internal and external enemies will be most constantly and actively (though often covertly and insidiously) directed will be the *National Union*,"—"the unity of government which constitutes us one people." And he enjoins it upon them "to discountenance whatever may suggest even a suspicion that it can, in any event, be abandoned, and indignantly to frown upon the first dawning of every attempt to alienate any portion of our country from the rest, or to enfeeble the sacred ties which now link together the various parts."

Thomas Jefferson succeeded Mr. Adams, and thenceforth a more definite shape was given to politics and parties—not by geographical lines so much as by different views of the powers and prerogatives of the general government. The leaders and supporters of the opposite creeds, known as Federalism and Democracy, were found indiscriminately at the South and at the North.

From 1787 to 1824, (with the exception of the one term of Mr. Adams,) Virginia furnished all our Presidents, viz: Washington, Jefferson, Madison, and Monroe. In 1825 there was no election by the people, and the House of Representatives placed John Q. Adams in the Executive chair. Then came Andrew Jackson, from Tennessee, and served eight years. Thus for twenty-eight of the first thirty-six years of our history, Virginia and Tennessee furnished the Presidents, and no complaint or resistance was manifested. No double term has been served by any President since Jackson. There had been already introduced into the political machinery the mischievous principle, that a political party, upon coming into power, is justified in using the patronage of the government for the benefit of its party friends and supporters; so that upon the accession of each new incumbent the successful party expects, *as a matter of right*, a division of the emoluments of office

among its leaders and friends. The effects of such a principle could not be otherwise than injurious to public virtue. It is nothing more nor less than a system of bribery administered under the forms of law. This mischievous doctrine keeps the political arena supplied with combatants. No sooner are the victors in possession of the spoils than the defeated party begin the struggle for their recovery. And the wisest and most beneficent administration would, in all probability, make enemies enough, in disappointed office-seekers alone, to ensure its overthrow after two terms, if not sooner. The extent of this obnoxious influence is all but boundless. Once in four years it exhibits itself on a more extended scale, but it is in daily and hourly force through all the grades of public service. A change in the political councils of Philadelphia settles and unsettles the present livelihood of many thousands of men. Who can shut his eyes to the tendency of a principle which makes the continuance of two thousand labourers in the service of the gas works of that city to depend upon their political opinions being in harmony with those of the dominant party! How far this dangerous ingredient in our political compound has engendered a lust for power and its concomitants, and so involved us in the present disasters, it is not easy to say.

The contest for the Presidency for the term of 1857-1861 was sharp, Mr. Buchanan and General Fremont being the rival candidates. The former received 174 out of 296 votes. Eleven States were greatly disappointed at this result, but they did not revolt, nor attempt to block the wheels of government. When the time came to select candidates to succeed Mr. Buchanan, the Democratic party divided, as did also their opponents, so that there were four steeds upon the course—viz: Breckinridge, Douglas, Lincoln and Bell. There was unusual animation in the preparatory proceedings, but all things were conducted under the same forms and with the same guards that had attended every previous election. There was no pretence of fraud or violence or unconstitutionality in a single step of the process, and Abraham Lincoln was found to be the choice of the people. From that moment he represented in his person the sovereign power of the United States of America, subject only to the ceremonies of inauguration.

But before his accession to office the most open and positive determination was expressed in the Southern section of the country to renounce their allegiance to the constitutional government of the country; and, unfortunately, there were connected with the chief administrative bureaux at Washington, and also with the army and navy, persons who did not disdain to avail themselves of their official positions to favour the opposers of the President elect, and to supply them beforehand with the means and facilities for making the contemplated resistance.

Since every constitutional provision had been as strictly observed in the election of Mr. Lincoln as in the election of Washington, Madison, and Jackson, there was of course nothing to be done but to proceed in the organization of the government. To execute the will of a majority of the electors was simply to comply with the plain provisions of the Constitution.

In the meanwhile the insurgents violently seized and held forts, arsenals, custom-houses, post-offices, and other property of the United States; declared themselves absolved from all allegiance to the government which they had covenanted to support and obey; formed themselves into an independent nation, with a new title and flag, and demanded recognition as such at home and abroad!

There could be no mistake as to the position of the two communities. If there ever was a legitimate government of the United States entitled to the obedience and support of the citizens, and the respect of foreign nations, the government inaugurated March 4, 1861, was such. Abraham Lincoln was placed in the Executive chair by the deliberate voice of a majority of the free citizens of the United States, uttered in accordance with the forms prescribed by the Constitution. Any State or any number of States might as lawfully and as reasonably have refused to acknowledge Jefferson or Jackson to be the Chief Executive officer of the government as the States of South Carolina, Virginia, or Georgia refuse to submit to the administration of Mr. Lincoln.

Of course the simple question for the rest of the country was, Shall we abandon the government or suppress the insurrection?

Shall we give up the ship or shall we sink the piratical craft that crosses her bows and attempts to interrupt her voyage? There could be but one answer in thoughtful minds and from patriotic lips, and history will record it to the credit of a loyal people.

It needed no angel nor prophet to instruct intelligent Americans as to their duty in such an emergency. They knew full well that the doctrine of "State sovereignty" when "stripped of the sophistical argument in which it is habited," means the subversion of the Federal Government. It is the arm that is stretched out between "rebellion and the halter, to rescue the traitor from the gibbet. The citizen of the nullifying State becomes a traitor to his country by obedience to the laws of the State, and a traitor to the State by obedience to the laws of his country. The scaffold and the battle-field stream alternately with the blood of their victims." To avoid such a frightful chaos, the only course was for the loyal States to present an unbroken front to the insurgents, and sternly and steadfastly insist on submission to the constituted authorities of the land, as the only condition on which hostilities can ever cease.

If it is asked upon what pretence the States in rebellion assumed that attitude, there can still be but one answer, and that, too, will history record to the shame of all disloyalists. It was because a majority of the free people of the country differed from them in the choice of a ruler for the term of four years! It was a repudiation of the principle which every American ploughboy understands as the very essence of a republican government, viz: *that the majority shall govern*.

But the inquiry still forces itself upon us, on what act of the general government could the insurgents put their finger by which the plain provisions of the Federal Constitution were violated? What privileges or protection did any of the States enjoy to which other States had equal claim and were refused? What obligations had the general government assumed which were neglected, or in what had it transcended the reservations of the several States? Could not Mr. Jefferson Davis enjoy in Massachusetts all the privileges of a citizen of the United States which Mr. Lincoln could have enjoyed in South Caro-

lina? Did the government accord mail facilities, harbour defences, aid to public improvements, or freedom of speech and of the press to the North, and deny them to the South? Was any Southern Senator ever struck down in the Senate chamber of the United States, unarmed and off his guard, by a Northern member of Congress? Was any Southern citizen ever denied a hearing in our Northern courts of law, and threatened with personal violence while seeking, in a peaceful and legitimate way to obtain a decision upon a legal question of public interest?

Nay, farther, who among the people of the States in rebellion even *now* complain that, in every substantial particular, the general government has not most honestly and faithfully fulfilled its obligations, or that a fair influence has been denied them in the councils and legislation of the country?

Did the farmers and mechanics of the insurgent States murmur at taxes imposed upon them by the Federal government, or at restrictions upon their liberty to go where and do what they would? Let the laws of the revolted section of the country, and the laws of the general government, be examined, and see which interfered most with the inalienable right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

Whence, then, it is asked again, this unnatural strife? Why is it that a country which but three years ago was at peace within itself and with all the world, and in the enjoyment of almost unprecedented prosperity, has suddenly become the theatre of a ferocious, bloody, devastating civil war?

The answer is at hand. *It is the fruit of an insatiable lust for power.* The great mass of the quiet, industrious, thrifty people of the land are drawn into a vortex which a few unprincipled demagogues have produced. Our vast foreign population—with habits, principles, and views not always in accordance with those which our American-born people love to cherish—have been made, in a large measure, subservient to the schemes of artful politicians. New interests have sprung up in different parts of the country, for which protection has been and is sought, and a system of “log-rolling” has been introduced into most of our legislative bodies, eminently favourable to the schemes of wily and corrupt men. The extension of the boun-

daries of the Union, the admission of new States, and the organization of new Territories, must of necessity have their influence in shaping the policy of the government, and test the elasticity of the Constitution to adapt itself to this new order of things, and in no important respect has it yet proved inadequate to the exigencies of the country. It is now encountering the sternest ordeal that any human government was ever called to pass. God grant it a safe deliverance!

There seems to have been but one interest that has suffered irreparably by the growth and prosperity of our country, and that is *African slavery*. It has asked and demanded a protection which the Constitution, neither in its letter nor spirit, could extend to it or allow it to receive. It asked liberty (or rather claimed the right) to extend itself into free territory, and the voice of the people, uttered in a constitutional form, said, emphatically, *No!* The political leaders in the slave States, seeing but too clearly that if this liberty were denied, and the institution to which they are wedded were restricted to its present limits, its extinction becomes a mere question of time, resolved upon the desperate alternative of *rebellion*; and inasmuch as many persons who had been conspicuous in the anti-slavery ranks favoured and acted with the party that nominated Mr. Lincoln, and as the time of the outgoing of one administration and the incoming of another is usually attended with some excitement and confusion, that was seized as a fitting juncture for a demonstration.

It is one of the notable tokens of the desperation which marks their course, that it should not have occurred to the seceders to consider what would be the position of their "peculiar institution" when the barriers with which the Federal government protected it, were removed. An eminent statesman once said, that "if Southern leaders would interpret the tendency of abolition doctrines wisely, they would see the value of the Union as the only thing which can preserve slavery from annihilation."

After the nucleus of a new confederacy was formed, by the separation of South Carolina from the body politic, it was not difficult to persuade those who had a common interest with her in preserving slavery, to join her fortunes; but it is confidently

believed that history—impartial history—will show, that in not one solitary case have the people of either of the States in rebellion, by a fair, deliberate vote, sanctioned the violation of the Union compact.

But the step once taken must be maintained, and the mustering and equipment of armies, the building of forts and ships of war, and the shock of battle soon proclaimed, with horrid emphasis, that brothers were in deadly strife.

And what can honest and true-hearted citizens now do but defend the national authority? Whatever of peace and prosperity and renown we have attained, were attained under this insulted government. Our national wealth and influence have grown up to their present position under the stars and stripes. Can we hope for a better government if we abandon the one we have? Can we trust those to govern us who themselves refuse to obey? We have a constitutional President, a constitutional legislature, and a constitutional judiciary. They may not be all or altogether such as we like, but who will guaranty something better in their place? Even if it were wise to organize our political system anew, who would rule while we are doing the work? Or who would select such a time as this for such a purpose?

If a feud should occur in a family, and two out of six children should rebel against parental authority, while the other four are disposed to think their father and mother about as good care-takers as they could expect under any change, it would clearly be the part of wisdom in the dutiful children to adhere to the old folks, rather than break up the family and see what would come out of the ruin.

Now the only true way for us to do in our present emergency is to make everything yield to the support of the government AS IT IS. Whatever mistakes, or neglects, or wrongs we see, or think we see, let them pass for the moment, considering that, at the worst, it is a better government than none. As soon as we are well out of this deadly struggle, we shall know with what elements we have to deal, and we can then punish, correct, and prevent as the case may demand. But *now* the watchword must be "Unity for the sake of the Union."

"There is a time to speak and a time to keep silence," and

this is a time for those who cannot uphold our government to keep silence. They must consent for the time being to endure what they may not approve, and to hold their peace, though they cannot endorse the policy of the administration. There was no mincing of matters with such persons in the great struggle of 1776, when there were far more plausible excuses for neutrality or for open opposition on the part of sympathisers with the British, than can be pleaded for present sympathy with the Southern insurgents, for many sagacious men held it to be very problematical whether the colonies would better their condition even if they succeeded in the contest. But no reflecting man (certainly no loyal man) can doubt that upon the complete and speedy suppression of this revolt depends—not only the prosperity and dignity, but the very existence of the American nation. The man who favours any terms with those in revolt, short of unconditional submission to the same powers that we acknowledge, is for taking away the only timber that shores up our vast political fabric, viz.: *the government*. Are our fellow-citizens prepared for the stupendous ruin that must follow? When the heroic struggle of the Revolution closed upon our impoverished country, burdened with an enormous debt, while the general stagnation of business and the great depreciation of the currency filled the people with gloom and discontent, it was not surprising that some open demonstrations of popular feeling should occur. And under such circumstances a plausible plea might be urged for leniency towards the offenders, which would be preposterous in the mouth of actors in the present insurrection. In two or three of the New England States such resistance was made to the public authorities as to require the employment of military force to suppress it, and fourteen of the leading spirits in the revolt were condemned to die.

It was in relation to this event that WASHINGTON, in a letter to COL. HENRY LEE, used the following language: "You talk, my dear sir, of employing influence to appease the present tumults in Massachusetts. I know not where that influence is to be found, or, if attainable, that it would be a proper remedy for the disorder. Influence is not government. Let us have a government by which our lives, liberties, and properties will be

secured, or let us know the worst at once. There is call for decision. Know precisely at what the insurgents aim. If they have *real* grievances redress them, if possible. * * * If they have not, employ the force of the government against them at once. Let the reins of government then be braced and held with a steady hand, and every violation of the Constitution be reprehended. If it be defective, let it be amended; but not suffered to be trampled upon whilst it has existence." Such words smack of good sense, sound logic, and true patriotism. Let them have their proper weight in these times.

And what construction can be placed upon attempts to make the government odious, or upon a deliberate refusal to sustain and defend it, but that of hostility to its existence, and, of course, sympathy with those who seek its subversion? Can a man take fire in his bosom and not be burned? Shall disloyalty lift up its voice in our streets in 1863, and not be rebuked as emphatically as toryism was rebuked in 1776? There is a lawful government of the country. It is the only organ through which the popular will of the United States can act. It cannot be displaced nor changed, but by violence, until the official term of the various incumbents expires. Can we do better than to uphold it, and crowd its enemies to the wall?

If the ground assumed by the States in revolt is yielded, what bond is there to hold together any two States that may remain—North or South, East or West? What becomes of our national power, influence, or title to respect? In such an event, must not the wealth and enterprise and energy of this young nation become the prey of contending factions, and our very name be a hissing and a byword among other nations?

Our countrymen, who have plunged us into this terrific strife, knew full well the advantage they will derive from a division in Northern sentiment. And hence, those who are disposed to foment such a division, are justly regarded as hostile to the government and abettors of revolt. We should do well to learn a lesson from our enemies in this behalf, who not only concentrate all their moral and physical strength upon the issue before them, but tolerate nothing that puts it in doubt or jeopardy.

What we need at this juncture is a fair expression of the

loyal sentiment of the country. Let all who are true to the banner of freedom come North, and all who favour its dishonour go South, and the most sceptical would soon be convinced that we are still a nation, and that we have a constitutional government which the people are resolved to maintain at all hazards. The fight is for liberty—FOR AMERICAN LIBERTY—and it must be fought by ourselves. Any foreign intrusion will be regarded as impertinent and insulting. “Uncalled for interference seldom avails with the contending parties, while the well-meaning mediator involves himself in the strife to his own mischief.” A wise king has warned the world, that he “who meddles with strife belonging not to him, is like one that taketh a dog by the ears.”

Let us, then, rally, one and all, for the *Union*—the Union one and indivisible. The moment the bond is sundered that holds the bundle of sticks together, each stick may be snapped like a pipe-stem.

There are those who profess to think well enough of the *government*, but they can have no patience with the *administration*. And pray, what is the “government?” Is it not the power vested by the Constitution in the executive, legislative, and judicial departments? And what is the “administration” to-day, but the agents constitutionally appointed to execute the will of the people of the United States? And is not this the government? If not, what is? Surely no sensible man can be duped by the extreme absurdity of supposing that the government can be loved and the administration hated. He who in the present crisis withholds his support from the Federal government, *as it is administered*—gives it, in the same measure, to the rebel government, *as it is administered*. ABRAHAM LINCOLN and *Jefferson Davis* represent the two powers that are in conflict, and it is true in this relation as in a higher and a holier one, that “no man can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other; or else he will hold to the one and despise the other.”

Our choice lies between the government we have and none at all. Every farmer, trader, mechanic, professional man, and labourer has a momentous interest in upholding the government till this storm is overpast. It will be time then to

consider suggestions of improvement and precaution. One week of anarchy would suffice to show the value of *authority*, even though imperfectly and injudiciously exercised. Let us turn a deaf ear, then, to the counsels of treacherous friends as well as open enemies, and hold no man in our confidence who does not, by word and act, sustain the constitutional government of the country. Side issues, however plausible, must not be entertained for a moment. If negro slavery is throttled in the present struggle, so be it. If it escapes, it will have but a short run; but if we lose the *government*, we are all slaves without the choice of a master!

Would that every man who has a drop of American blood in his veins could forget all other ties and interests till this transcendent question of NATIONAL INTEGRITY is decided! We are guardians of a sacred trust—more sacred than that in the keeping of any other nation upon which the sun ever shone. If we are true to ourselves, our passage through this fiery ordeal will but establish more firmly and lastingly our wise and beneficent government, and an unexampled career of national grandeur and prosperity awaits us.

If, on the other hand, we allow ourselves to be weakened and distracted by divided counsels and irrelevant controversies, the enemy will triumph over us, the slave-power will usurp the throne of constitutional liberty, and our madness and infamy will find appropriate monuments in barren fields, shipless harbours, closed factories and workshops, unwrought mines, desolated towns and villages, deserted sanctuaries and school-houses, and a degraded, dispirited population ready to bow their necks to the heel of some military despot!

Such is not the heritage we received from our fathers. Shall it be the heritage we leave to our children?





